



Discovering the Old Testament/Hebrew Scriptures

Winter 2021, Lecture 2

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Themes in Genesis

- Creation and Political Cohesion
- God and Humanity's Mandate
- God's Domain: Life vs. Death
- Survival: why did the family of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob survive?

Text: Enuma Elish

- Babylonian epic of creation, written in Akkadian cuneiform
- First discovered by Henry Laird in 1849 during the excavation of Nineveh
- Describes the triumph of the God Marduk over the chaos-monster Tiamat



Enuma Elish: Opening

When on high the heaven had not been named,
Firm ground below had not been called by name,
When primordial Apsu, their begetter,
And Mummu-Tiamat, she who bore them all,
Their waters mingled as a single body,
No reed hut had sprung forth, no marshland had appeared,
None of the gods had been brought into being,
And none bore a name, and no destinies determined--
Then it was that the gods were formed in the midst of heaven.
Lahmu and Lahamu were brought forth, by name they were
called.

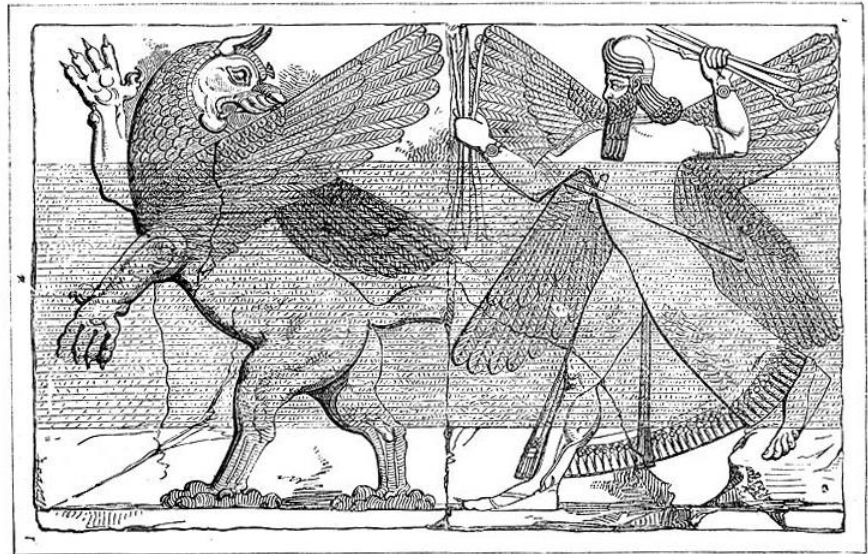
Enuma Elish: Tiamat's Army and Minions

Sharp of tooth, unsparing of fang.
With venom for blood she has filled their bodies.
Roaring dragons she has clothed with terror,
Has crowned them with haloes, making them like gods,
So that he who beholds them is overcome by terror,
Their bodies rear up and none can withstand their attack.
She has set up the Viper, the Dragon, and the Sphinx,
The Great-Lion, the Mad-Dog, and the Scorpion-Man,
Mighty lion-demons, the Dragon-Fly, the Centaur--
Bearing weapons that spare not, fearless in battle.

Enuma Elish: The Battle

She recites a charm, keeps casting her spell,
While the gods of battle sharpen their weapons.
Then Tiamat and Marduk joined issue, wisest of gods.
They strove in single combat, locked in battle.

The lord spread out his net to
enfold her,
The Evil Wind, which followed
behind, he let loose in her
face.



Enuma Elish: Finale

When Tiamat opened her
mouth to consume him,
He drove in the Evil Wind
while as yet she had not
shut her lips
As the terrible winds filled her
belly,
Her body was distended and her
mouth was wide open.



He released the arrow, it tore her belly, It cut through her insides,
splitting the heart. Having thus subdued her, he extinguished her
life.

He cast down her carcass to stand upon it.

Psalm 33:6 –

**By the word of the LORD the heavens were made,
and all their host by the breath of his mouth.
He gathered the waters of the sea as in a bottle;
he put the deeps in storehouses.**

Let all the earth fear the LORD,
let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of
him!

**For he spoke, and it came to be;
he commanded, and it stood forth.**

Psalm 33, continued...

The LORD brings the counsel of the nations to nought;

he frustrates the plans of the peoples.

The counsel of the LORD stands for ever,
the thoughts of his heart to all generations.

Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD,
the people whom he has chosen as his heritage!

Psalm 136

O give thanks to the Lord of lords,
to him who alone does great wonders,
to him who by understanding **made the heavens,**
to him who **spread out the earth upon the**
waters,
to him who **made the great lights,**
the sun to rule over the day,
the moon and stars to rule over the night,

Psalm 136, continued...

to him who **smote the first-born of Egypt**,
and **brought Israel out** from among them,
with a strong hand and an outstretched arm,
to him who divided the Red Sea in sunder,
and made Israel pass through the midst of it,
but **overthrew Pharaoh** and his host in the Red
Sea,

to him who led his people through the
wilderness,

to him who **smote great kings**,

Psalm 136, continued...

and slew famous kings,
Sihon, king of the Amorites,
and Og, king of Bashan,
and **gave their land as a heritage,**
a heritage to Israel his servant,

O give thanks to the God of heaven.

Nehemiah 9:6 ff.

- "Thou art the LORD, thou alone; **thou hast made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them; and thou preservest all of them...** Thou art the LORD, the God who didst choose Abram and bring him forth out of Ur of the Chaldeans... and didst make with him the covenant **to give to his descendants the land of the Canaanite, the Hittite, the Amorite, the Perizzite, the Jebusite, and the Girgashite; and thou hast fulfilled thy promise..."**

Nehemiah 9, continued...

"And thou didst see the affliction of **our fathers in Egypt** and hear their cry at the Red Sea, and didst perform signs and wonders against Pharaoh and all his servants and all the people of his land... **Thou didst come down upon Mount Sinai, and speak with them from heaven and give them right ordinances and true laws, good statutes and commandments...**"

Genesis as Anti-Babylonian Polemic

Babylonian World view

- Gods were born or emerged
- Primary god has multiple rivals and allies
- Creates by combat and destruction
- Humans are tools for doing the gods' dirty work
- The God/King is a conqueror

Israelite World View

- God is self-existent
- God is basically uncontested; he has no rivals
- Creates by fiat
- Humanity is a highly divine creation
- God is a gardener

God and Humanity's Mandate (Gen. 1)

26 Then God said, 'Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them **have dominion** over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.'



Humanity: A Special Creation

1:27, So God ***created*** humankind in his image, in the image of God he ***created*** them; male and female he ***created*** them.



Humanity's Mandate, continued...

Gen. 1:28, God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.' 29 God said, 'See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food.

What is “Dominion”?

- Only extends to the animals, not the earth
- The creation does not end with the creation of humanity
- God hands over the world to humans to continue the creative process
- “Creation” is defined as that which is organized in a way that generates/sustains life
- “Chaos” is that which is antithetical to life.

Roles of God, Humans

- God is a god of life
- Humans are allowed to do most of what God does in extending and maintaining creation
- God retains exclusive power over life, fertility, and death



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SCIENCE

The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis

Lynn White, Jr.

A conversation with Aldous Huxley not infrequently put one at the receiving end of an unforgettable monologue. About a year before his lamented death he was discoursing on a favorite

helped to exterminate the monster mammals of the Pleistocene from much of the globe is plausible, if not proved. For 6 millennia at least, the banks of the lower Nile have been

nating in our own time in the reclamation of the Zuider Zee. What, if any, species of animals, birds, fish, shore life, or plants have died out in the process? In their epic combat with Neptune have the Netherlanders overlooked ecological values in such a way that the quality of human life in the Netherlands has suffered? I cannot discover that the questions have ever been asked, much less answered.

People, then, have often been a dynamic element in their own environment, but in the present state of historical scholarship we usually do not know exactly when, where, or with what effects man-induced changes came. As we enter the last third of the 20th century, however, concern for the problem of ecologic backlash is mounting



We shall continue to have a
worsening ecologic crisis until we
reject the Christian axiom that
nature has no reason for existence
save to serve man.

— *Lynn Townsend White* —

AZ QUOTES

God's Exclusive Control of Life

- Humans are vegetarians, may not use animals
- God makes clothing of skins for Adam and Eve
- Murder is a sin
- God to Abraham, “I will multiply you...”
- Rachel to Jacob, “Give me children or I will die!” Jacob to Rachel, “Am I God??”
- “*God opened* the womb of Rachel...”

Post-Deluge: Humanity 2.0

- **3 Every moving thing that lives** shall be food for you; and just as I gave you the green plants, I give you everything. **4 Only, you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood.** **5** For your own lifeblood I will surely require a reckoning: **from every animal** I will require it and **from human beings**, each one for the blood of another, I will require a reckoning for human life.

Genesis: A Story of Survival

- What is the purpose of the stories of the Patriarchs?
- To explain how they obtained God's favor and why they survived
- Hospitality: Genesis emphasizes that the Patriarchs generally held sacred the rules of hospitality.

Rules of Hospitality

- Offering food, shelter and protection to a guest was a sacred obligation
- Enabled trade, commerce, communication
- The host was obligated to see to the needs of the guest
- Host was obligated to protect the person of the guest, even at the risk of his own family members
- “You will offer shelter, even to your father’s murderer.”

Gen. 18:2-5 [Abraham] looked up and saw three men standing near him. When he saw them, **he ran from the tent entrance to meet them**, and bowed down to the ground. He said, 'My lord, if I find favor with you, do not pass by your servant. Let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree. **Let me bring a little bread**, that you may refresh yourselves, and after that you may pass on—since you have come to your servant.' So they said, 'Do as you have said.'



6-8 And Abraham hastened into the tent to Sarah, and said, 'Make ready quickly **three measures** of choice flour, knead it, and make cakes.'

Abraham ran to the herd, and took a calf, tender and good, and gave it to the servant, who hastened to prepare it. Then he took curds and milk and the calf that he had prepared, and set it before them; **and he stood by them** under the tree while they ate.

- “Measure” = “*Seah*”
- 1 *Seah* = 7.33 liters or 6.6 quarts
- 3 *Seahs* = 19.9 quarts



Lot's Hospitality

- Men of Sodom threaten Lot's guests with violence
- Lot—correctly—offer the mob his two daughters
- Author is trying to explain why Sodom was destroyed, and why Lot's family was spared.

What Happens In
**SODOM &
GOMORRAH**
Stays In
**SODOM &
GOMORRAH**

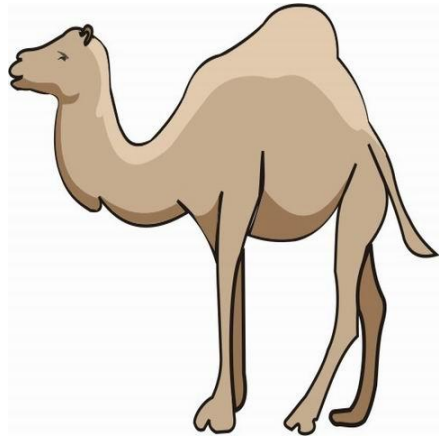
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Rebecca and the Servant of Abraham

- Seeking a wife for Isaac, the servant tells God what he wants
- “Drink, and I will water your camels also.”
- He is looking for someone who will respect the institution of hospitality.



WARNING: Story Problem



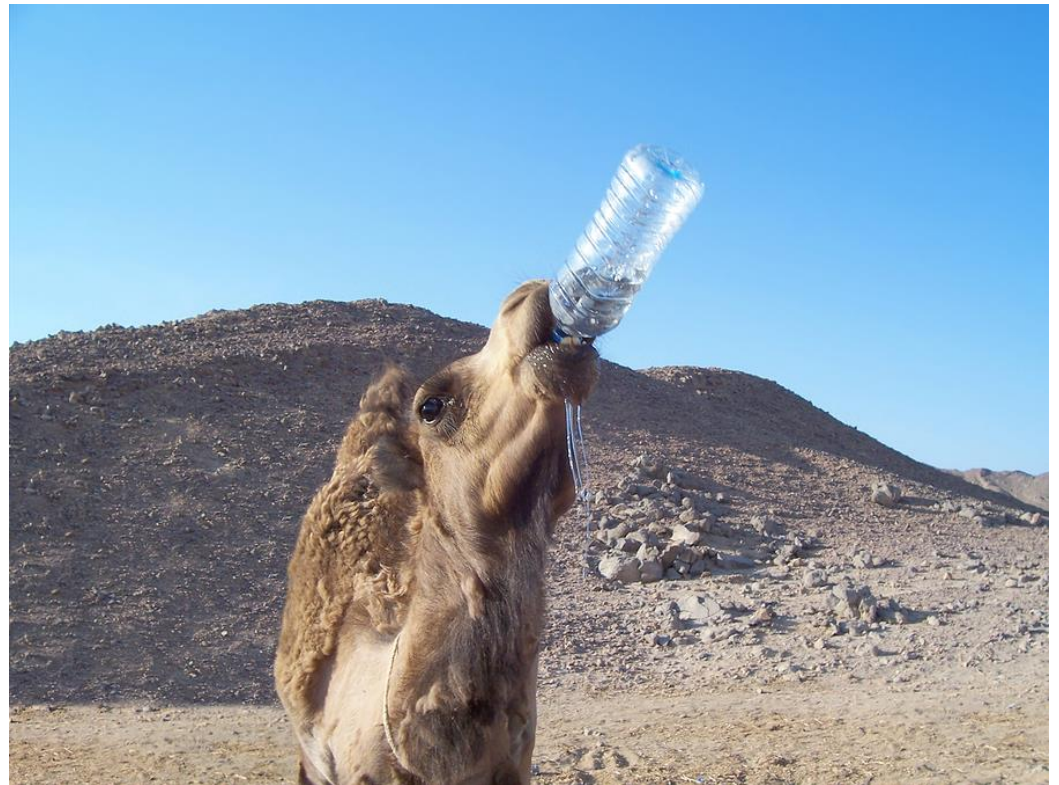
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≈ 2.5 Gals.

Story Problem, continued...

One camel coming out of the desert can consume ≈ 25 gallons of water without stopping.



Story Problem, Conclusion

- How much water did the camels drink?
- 250 gallons
- How many trips to the well did Rebecca make?
- 100 trips
- Bonus: how much did all that water weigh?
- > 2,000 lbs. of water.

Exercise: Treaty-Covenant Pattern in the Torah?

We talked about the Historical Prologue as part of the Treaty-Covenant Pattern last week.

Question: Is Genesis a historical prologue that precedes the stipulations of the Law found in Exodus, et al?

Mosaic Law

- Variations, revisions, repetitions

Main Points:

- Purity Laws: Holy vs. Common, Pure vs. Impure
- Food Laws: Restricting the taking of animal life
- Economic Laws: Preventing the concentration of power
- Prevention of syncretism with surrounding cults



Fundamental Concepts

Holiness

- God is the source of holiness
- Associated with wholeness, completeness, orderliness
- Orderliness → Life/Cosmos
- Increases as one draws closer to the Sanctuary
- Impurity impinges on the realm of holiness

Purity

- Qualifies one to participate in religious life
- List of defiling agents have association with death or loss of life
- List of agents is arbitrary
- Not to be confused with sin
- Purity system is *symbolic*

Purity

- In the ancient Near East, impurity generally thought to be associated with demonic possession. To be impure was to be vulnerable.
- In ancient Israel, it was converted to a symbolic system designed to drive home the primacy of life over death.
- Impurity is the antithesis of holiness.

What Causes Impurity?

- Contact with a corpse
- Leper (skin disease)
- Gonorrhoea
- Semen-emitter
- Menstruant
- Parturient

The common denominator is that they are associated with the realm of death or loss of life.

Purity/Impurity: The Point

- The system was symbolic
- Impurity is not the same as sin; you don't "repent" from being impure
- Introducing impurity to the *sancta* is a sin
- Death and its symbols were excluded from the realm of the holy
- The point was to serve as a constant reminder of the power of life over the realm of death.

The Dietary (Kosher) Laws



Dietary Criteria

- Chew the cud, split hoof
- No predators or scavengers
- Must have fins and scales
- “Creeping” things forbidden, except locusts
- Etc.

As with the purity/impurity regulations, the criteria are arbitrary, but in the service of a larger point.

Humanity's Use of Animals

- Garden of Eden: Humans are vegetarians.
- Noah: Animals permitted if the blood is drained and not ingested.
- God retains jurisdiction over “life” contained in the blood.



Leviticus 17:2-4 Profane Slaughter

...This is what the Lord has commanded. If anyone of the house of Israel slaughters an **ox or a lamb or a goat** in the camp, or slaughters it outside the camp, and does not bring it to the entrance of the tent of meeting, to present it as an offering to the Lord before the tabernacle of the Lord, **he shall be held guilty of bloodshed**; he has shed blood, and **he shall be cut off** from the people.

Leviticus 17:10-11 Ingesting Blood

If anyone of the house of Israel or of the aliens who reside among them **eats any blood**, I will set my face against that person who **eats blood**, and will cut that person off from the people. For the life of the flesh is in the blood; and I have given it to you for making atonement for your lives on the altar; for, as life, it is the blood that makes atonement.

Ingestion of Blood, continued...

12 Therefore I have said to the people of Israel: No person among you shall **eat blood**, nor shall any alien who resides among you **eat blood**. ...

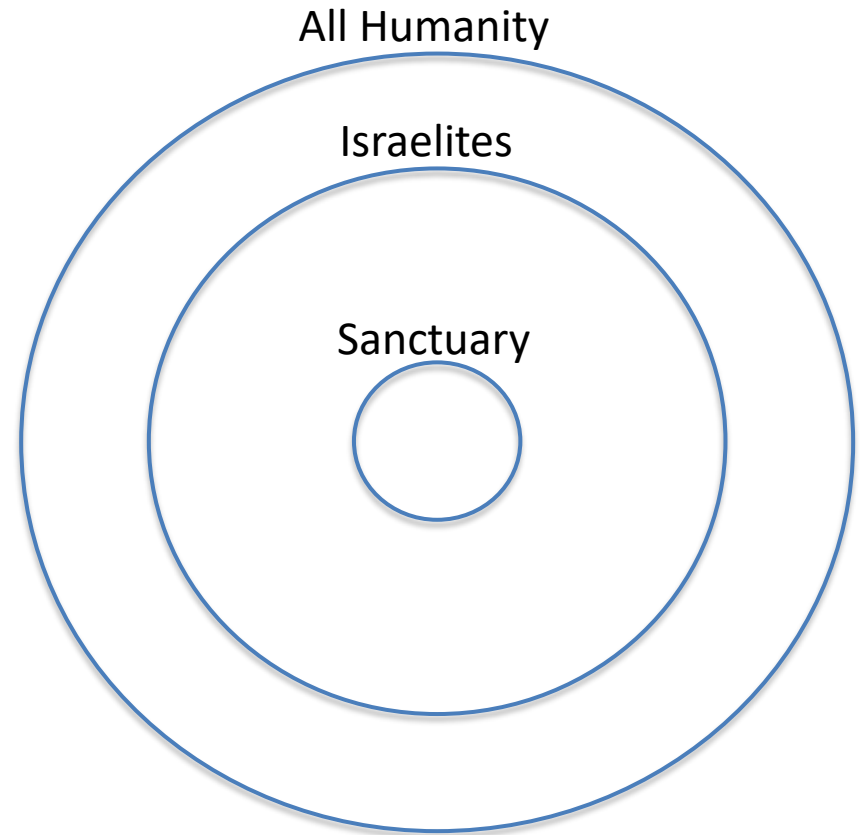
14 For the life of every creature—its blood is its life; therefore I have said to the people of Israel: You shall not **eat the blood** of any creature, for the life of every creature is its blood; whoever **eats it** shall be cut off.

Side Note: “Shall be cut off”

- The “*karet*” penalty
- Reserved for crimes against Deity
- Punished by God, not humanity
- Generally thought to mean the extirpation of the offenders lineage
- Does not necessarily mean the death of the offender

Holiness vs. Constraints on Animals

- Humans are allowed all animals
- Israelites allowed only “clean” animals
- Only unblemished cattle, goats, sheep, (sacrificial animals) allowed at the Sanctuary.



Dietary Laws: Rationales

- As with Purity, the list of criteria is arbitrary
 - Some are based on fears of syncretism (pork)
 - Some rules address the needs of the destitute (Locusts allowed).
- In order to at least partly replicate humanity in its ideal state, Israelite law attempted to restrict the taking of animal life to an acceptable minimum.

“Charity” vs. “Justice”

- What is sometimes translated “charity” is in fact better rendered as “justice.”
- “Justice” is not retributive, but restorative; “as things should be.”



The Israelite Social Safety Net

1. Free food gathered from farms at any time; gleanings freely available to the poor. Farmers left the margins of their fields unharvested for the poor.
2. A produce tax available to the poor every third year.
3. Every seven years, land fallow, its produce freely available to the poor (the Sabbatical Year).
4. Loans *required* from the well-off to the poor.

Social Safety Net, continued...

5. Limits placed on the collateral the poor were to offer for a loan.
6. Loans interest-free to Israelites.
7. Outstanding balance of a loan cancelled every seven years (the Sabbatical Year).
8. Land reverts to original holders at maximum every forty-nine years (the Jubilee).
9. Fallback provisions, such as bond-servitude, available to the struggling poor.

Source: Exo. 20-23; Deut. 4-31; Lev. 17-26.

1st Century Social Justice (Luke 4)

18 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim
release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,
19 **to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.'**



Syncretism and Monotheism

Psalms 136: O give thanks
to the Lord of lords...
to him who made the
great lights,
the sun to rule over the
day,
the moon and stars to
rule over the night

Genesis 1: “...**the greater
light** to rule the day,
and **the lesser light** to
rule the night.”

Shemesh = “Sun”

Shamshu = A solar deity

Shmsh ... ?

Syncretism: What is an Abomination?

Premises

- Israel was monotheistic/henotheistic
- The Promised Land itself was intrinsically holy
- The Land would respond to defilement by ejecting those who polluted it

The Definition (Lev. 18)

24 Do not defile yourselves in any of these ways, for by all these practices the nations I am casting out before you have defiled themselves. 25 **Thus the land became defiled**; and I punished it for its iniquity, and **the land vomited out its inhabitants.**

Definition of Abomination, cont...

26 But you shall keep my statutes and my ordinances and commit none of these abominations, either the citizen or the alien who resides among you 27 (for the inhabitants of the land, who were before you, **committed all of these abominations, and the land became defiled**); 28 otherwise the land will vomit you out for defiling it, **as it vomited out the nation that was before you.**

Definition of Abomination, cont...

29 For whoever commits any of these abominations **shall be cut off** from their people. 30 So keep my charge not to commit any of these abominations that were done before you, and not to defile yourselves by them: I am the Lord your God.

Repentance and Sacrifice

- Sacrifice alone does not expiate sin and obtain divine forgiveness
- Wrongdoing requires repentance, recompense where appropriate
- The sacrifice creates closure, signals completion of repentance

